



[G W F Hegel, 1770 - 1831](#)

One World, One History

This series on “Philosophy, Religion, and Revolution” is intentionally Marxist. In that regard, like everyone else, we must rely upon the works of the 1840s for philosophy, most especially the 1844 “[Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right](#)”, the 1845 “[Theses on Feuerbach](#)”, and the 1845/46 “[The German Ideology](#)” - although none of these were published in Marx’s lifetime.

The next group of original Marxist works that explicitly address philosophical questions are from the pen of Frederick Engels,

during the time when he wrote and published the book known as “[Anti-Dühring](#)”, which came out in 1877. One of the spin-offs of “Anti-Dühring” is the main article, “[On Dialectics](#)”, linked below, written as a preface. The publication of the book was followed by another spin-off, called “[Socialism, Utopian and Scientific](#)”. In the 1880s, Engels wrote about philosophy again, in his book “[Ludwig Feuerbach](#)”.

Among other things, we are going to be pursuing the idea that philosophy is indispensable to politics, as well as to science, and that weakness in philosophy will have, and in the past did have, disastrous effects upon political work.

Engels’ “Anti-Dühring” is the work that contains the notorious “tools of analysis” that encourage the illusion that people can have a simple set of keys to the kingdom of knowledge. This course will leave those “tools” aside, deliberately; but we are obliged to spend some time with the book in general, because it has been so influential.

The book is an argument against a person who was otherwise of quite little consequence in political history. Engels spends a tedious amount of time explaining Dühring’s errors before he allows himself to express a fully-elaborated alternative world-outlook as compared to Dühring’s. In this way, “Anti-Dühring” became a compendium of alternative, Marxist, thought.

Thus, Engels spends the first page of this preface with Dühring, before breaking away with the remark that “theoretical thought is a historical product”. Then he begins to expound

dialectics, investigated, as he says, prior to his and Marx's work, only by [Hegel](#) [Image, above] and by the Ancient Greek philosopher, [Aristotle](#). Dialectics *"alone offers the analogue for, and thereby the method of explaining, the evolutionary processes occurring in nature, inter-connections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another,"* says Engels.

Engels goes further, pointing out that, then as now:

"All that was saved from the remnants of classical philosophy was a certain neo-Kantianism, whose last word was the eternally unknowable thing-in-itself, that is, the bit of Kant that least merited preservation. The final result was the incoherence and confusion of theoretical thought now prevalent.

"One can scarcely pick up a theoretical book on natural science without getting the impression that natural scientists themselves feel how much they are dominated by this incoherence and confusion, and that the so-called philosophy now current offers them absolutely no way out. And here there really is no other way out, no possibility of achieving clarity, than by a return, in one form or another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking."

The claim that Engels is making for dialectics is that it, and only it, can embrace the entirety of human thought through history, as well as the entirety of human understanding in the

present. Because of dialectics, because of Aristotle, [Hegel](#), Marx and Engels, all of this becomes possible and at the same time, therefore, unavoidable.

“Classical” philosophy for Engels mainly referred to the work of [Immanuel Kant](#) (1724-1804) and GWF Hegel (1770-1831). Engels and Marx were Hegelians, but not “Old-Hegelians”. This explains why Engels seems to reject Hegel, or to want to correct Hegel, and stand Hegel on his feet where before he was standing on his head; and yet, Engels praises dialectic above all, and the historic reintroduction of dialectical thinking is owed entirely to Hegel, which Engels knows very well, and acknowledges.

The Hegelian recognition of unity in human history, experience, and understanding is simultaneously a great breakthrough and pillar of our age, but is also a contested, and to some extent unabsorbed idea. It would make racism impossible, for example; yet racism survives. There remain opposing schools of philosophy, and the irrational, anti-human and reactionary system called “post-modernism” has in recent decades become the mental currency of Imperialism.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [On Dialectics, 1878, Engels](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).